

# Conasauga River Watershed Nonpoint Source Conservation and Education Initiative

**Project Description:** The Conasauga River begins high in the Blue Ridge Mountains in north Georgia and descends rapidly north into Tennessee. Flowing west for several miles, the river then returns to Georgia for the remainder of its 91-mile length. The Conasauga River watershed - all the land that drains into the river - includes almost 500,000 acres of land and nearly 125,000 people. The Georgia portion of the watershed includes approximately 400,000 acres and 100,000 people. Local citizens, businesses, and industry benefit from the river, its tributaries, and the surrounding lands. The river provides local residents with many recreational opportunities, outstanding game fish, and most important, water for agriculture, drinking water for homes and businesses, and large quantities of water for the area's important carpet industry.



**Conasauga River**



**Blue Shiner**

The waters of the Conasauga River are also home to more than 90 different species of fish, including the amber darter, the blue shiner, and the frecklebelly madtom. One species of fish, the Conasauga logperch, is found in a 20-mile section of the river and nowhere else in the world. Some of the rarest river inhabitants are the two dozen species of freshwater mussels that live in the bottom of the river. These animals, including the southern pigtoe and triangular kidneyshell, filter the river's waters for nourishment. Of all of the fish, mussels, and other aquatic species of the Conasauga River, 25 species are considered rare, and 12 of these species are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Unfortunately, the river faces several threats, including increased levels of fecal coliform bacteria, sediment, nutrients, and toxic chemicals and metals. The sources of these stresses to the waters of the Conasauga include certain practices related to crop and animal agriculture, forestry, recreation, road construction and maintenance, and expanding residential and industrial development.

Through this project, the Limestone Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council and its partners will implement a comprehensive watershed management program in the Conasauga River watershed. This initiative includes three primary objectives:

- Remediate the most significant sources of nonpoint source (NPS) pollution in the Conasauga River watershed (fecal coliform bacteria, sediment, nutrients, toxic chemicals, and metals).
- Develop and implement a targeted community outreach and conservation education program for key landholders, partners, and the community at large.
- Monitor and evaluate the results of the conservation methodologies employed.

The project will be five years in duration with "on the ground" Best Management Practices (BMPs) implementation in the first four years and public education and monitoring to extend throughout the five-year period. A field representative, located within the watershed at the Conasauga River Field Office in Murray County, will provide daily support in implementing the project. Results of these efforts will be analyzed by means of water quality monitoring, photography, and sampling of public knowledge and attitudes.

This holistic approach of demonstration and corrective action BMP projects, public education, and monitoring will help reduce the pollution in the waters of the Conasauga and restore the river to meet its designated uses.

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**Lead Agency:** Limestone Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc.  
**Funding: EPA 319:** \$381,360 **Matching:** \$254,240  
**Project Location:** GA, Fannin, Murray, Whitfield and Gordon Counties

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**Link: The Conasauga River Alliance:** <http://www.conasaugariver.net/>